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ABSTRACT

A short review was made of the family, community, and school problems of disadvantaged children. The author then turned her attention to the help that the teachers of these children can give toward developing and improving the children's self-image and promoting and reinforcing positive attitudes. Opinions are expressed as to why some past educational programs for the disadvantaged have not been successful, and descriptions are given of programs and ideas that work. The author challenges reading teachers to give their unstinted aid to disadvantaged students who are attempting to find a new way of life. References are included. (NH)

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Reading Programs For Various Cultural Groups

CAN THE DISADVANTAGED SUCCEED IN READING?

The community assumes certain basic obligations for the welfare of its children, such as good health, education, religious and moral training, recreation, guidance and career planning. The major institutions of our society responsible for the education of our children are the schools. Each community usually determines the kind and quality of education it offers its children, good, bad, or indifferent. The education in the schools for the disadvantaged child is often inferior in kind and quality to the education afforded the advantaged child in his community.

Problems of the Family and Community

The parents of the disadvantaged child are not affluent, neither are they financially secure. They have limited educational and cultural development. They are not heard when complaining about their relegated insecure and inferior existence. Nobody needs their vote to obtain a political office. They do not have any skills to offer the labor market, and those who do possess skills often find that their skills are obsolete. Our welfare system has been most ineffective in meeting the needs of the disadvantaged family, truly an isolate of the entire community. How does the disadvantaged solve the problems inherent in his home conditions, socio-economic status, emotional instability and loneliness as he attempts to provide cultural enrichment opportunities for his children?

The kind of family life a child experiences to a degree depends upon the emotional resources of the parents. The disadvantaged family is usually disorganized primarily caused by the movement of the family from rural and small towns to the cities. Here the disadvantaged lose their identity, sense of values, their worth and join the destroyers, the rioters, the bombers, and the disrupters as they attempt to take control of our cities and government. These are frustrated people who have not had their emotional needs met over a long period of time. They are frustrated, defeated, and thwarted from working long hard hours on dead-end jobs without any future advancement. Harrington (4) has labeled these jobs as sub-employment. The parents, in turn, pass their frustration on to their children.

Winch (14) states that the motive power or dynamics for all behavior is predicated on need. The disadvantaged generally shut off from the rest of society still attempts alone to meet the needs of their children.

Queen (9) believes family stability is not an outstanding characteristic in our country. Yet communities across our land expect, and in some instances, demand that the disadvantaged family function as smoothly and orderly as do the others. This is still impossible in our crises-prone society. Mead (7) observed that human beings have worked hard at learning to become human and these learned behavior patterns are fragile and never inherited.

School Problems

Children from this type of environment present the school with many and varied personal, emotional, mental, and physical problems. The child learns his native language from his family, while the family attemps to meet his physical and emotional needs. However, when these needs are not met in the home by the family, the children take these unmet needs to school. Christopher (2) noticed a functional relationship between parental value of achievement and academic performance. Are our schools equipped with the staff, materials, and supplies to help the disadvantaged child attempt to confront and work through these problems as he competes with the advantaged child? Most of our schools are not ready to help the disadvantaged child adjust to his new environment because of restricted services and programs, rather, they sometime cause

the disadvantaged student to develop feelings that they are not worth the time and energy expended in their behalf.

He begins his school career as an outsider not really included in the curriculum or services of the school. The student's need for attention is determined by the interplay of personality, family, environmental opportunity, and resources.

Self-Image

Teachers of disadvantaged students may be aware of these problems which the student brings with him to class, but most of the teachers are not trained nor do they have the necessary facilities or services needed to help these students. The energy needed for performance is usually dissipated by the student as he attempts to solve his problems. These problems prevent the student from performing to his capacity, damages his self-image and fosters negative attitudes about class activities, especially reading tasks. Wattenberg and Clifford (12) have found self-concept is predictive of reading achievement, while Williams and Cole (13) have obtained positive correlations between self-concept and reading achievement. Every student needs facility in reading because it is a tool that must be used effectively as they progress through our educational institutions. Those students who are not motivated to perform to their capacity are lost.

Teachers may improve the self-image and develop positive attitudes for the disadvantaged by being aware of their problems. It is impossible to teach a tired, hungry, cold, unloved, unwanted student to

want to read. When teachers are successful in motivating and stimulating their students, the students achieve while developing confidence and are motivated to continue to succeed. The most important factor in teaching disadvantaged students to read is the attitude of the teacher. The ego disturbances of the disadvantaged student must be adjusted if he is to have any success in reading achievement. Muma (8) relates that achievement is an indicator of social adjustment. The reading teacher should develop a positive relationship with his students and establish an emotional climate which causes students to interact with each other and with the teacher. Most students do not talk because they may feel rejected by the class and the teacher. Teachers should develop sociometric tests to ascertain acceptance or rejection of the individual student by his peer group. Teachers need to know the attitudes, customs, and mores of the community in which the student lives. When the attitudes and environment are changed, the behavior patterns of the students also become modified.

Positive Attitudes

Reading teachers may help promote positive attitudes by accepting the students usage level of language. The ego satisfaction may be enhanced by fostering the students' feelings of importance. Personality fulfillment may also be developed by having students engaged in activities they consider important, performing tasks well, engaging in projects that they have selected and want to perform. Reading teachers, if you want to truly communicate that you care for your students, just listen to them

talk and try to understand how they feel. These students came from a frustrating environment which produces hostility. When this hostility is repressed it produces depression and more problems; however, all hostility is not repressed but it may be acted out in overt behavioral patterns. In any event, it will not be easy for the reading teacher to deal with the feelings of his students. Don't use emotionally biased constructs but seek the truth about these disadvantaged students.

Perhaps one of the best ways to increase your understanding of their immediate pleasures and harsh physical punishment is to try to live on a welfare allowance. The writer's New Year's resolution was to attempt to live on a welfare food budget of twenty-three cents per meal for three meals a day. The poverty diet which was consumed for ten days consisted of a bowl of dry cereal, a glass of juice, two eggs, and a cup of tea for breakfast; lunch was skipped in order to save money; dinner was rice and a cup of tea; and supper was more rice and an orange. At the end of the experiment, weight had been lost. This was really learning Economics the rough way--being left out of everything that we call human except existence; the future did not exist; and life was depressing indeed. Learn to read, there was no energy or desire for reading activities.

Reasons For Changes

Reach out to the disadvantaged student; attempt to understand some of his problems and then begin to teach him. Jensen (5) reports the disadvantaged student has the ability to learn basic skills taught by

associative learning activities. If the disadvantaged student is capable of learning then why has he not been taught?

Some programs have failed to meet the needs of the disadvantaged student. Many of the programs designed expressly for the disadvantaged student have been hastily organized. Adequately trained staff and personnel were not always available. Programs have been predicated on increasing the I. Q. when the emphasis should have been on achievement. Enrichment activities have been used for exposure only and they should have been used as learning situations. Planning has not made evaluation a continuous process or integral part of the program. The pre-service and in-service training programs have not been effectively used for a specific approach or technique and to afford teachers the opportunity to evaluate their attitudes of the entirely different disadvantaged student. These programs have been cure-alls rather than preventive measures.

When disadvantaged students are forced to cooperate while competing with advantaged students, the results are damaging to the self-image of the disadvantaged student. He is different; he needs a different educational setting and an imaginative curriculum. Reading programs must be developed to meet the needs and conditions of the disadvantaged student as they exist with constant evaluation and flexibility to change with the discovery of new evidence. Smith (11) has explored a resident camp reading program for such students whose gains in reading achievement were noted. Shore, Massimo, and Ricks (10) have utilized factor analysis on thematic stories in their research on group guidance. This study has proved there is a positive relationship between academic performance and

self-image, control of aggressiveness, and attitudes toward authority.

Cultural Community Involvement

As we consider the needs of the disadvantaged there is a necessity for further involvement of the school systems with the services of the community, especially the cultural, employment, financial, health, police, fire, and welfare services. An example of community involvement in the form of prevention rather than a cure of reading difficulties is the operation of three nursery schools by the American Association of University Women Inter-Branch Council of Detroit (1). These nursery schools provide inner-city children with pre-kindergarten experiences and also involve their parents in monthly meetings. Three and four-year-olds spend half-day sessions with a one to four ratio of volunteer aides to the children. The children who began in the nursery five years ago have maintained their educational advantage through the second grade. Two-thirds of the parents come weekly for special interest sessions which they have chosen, such as home nursing, how to save money, furniture buying, weight watching and field trips.

Research and Success

Farson (3) predicts that the future education will include the family as a learning unit rather than the individual because the best learning unit consists of the person nearest to the learner. A family learning unit study embracing infants has been conducted by the Demonstration and Research Center for Early Education, George Peabody College (15). The results have indicated the home visitor can modify the mother's interactions with her baby and cognitive stimulation materials have been developed for use by the mother. The infants six to nine months old were from low-income families. Mothers read a picture book

to the child a few minutes each day which encouraged the infant's verbalization. The fathers were involved in this project one hundred per cent.

An examination of other successful reading programs for the disadvantaged student revealed a wide variety of programs and services. Some of the most interesting programs were:

Intensive Reading Instructional Teams
Hartford, Connecticut -- OE-37038

Elementary Reading Centers
Milwaukee, Wisconsin -- OE-37031

Programmed Tutorial Reading Project
Indianapolis, Indiana -- OE-37029

Malabar Reading Program for Mexican-American Children
Los Angeles, California -- OE-37053

Augmented Reading Project
Pomona, California -- OE-37048.

Is it possible to humanize the disadvantaged student without effective reading programs? The reading teacher may be the only person in the disadvantaged student's life that has been able to meet his emotional needs. This may be brought about by accepting the child with dignity, respect, and non-judgmental acceptance of him, and being really concerned about his welfare. Students drop out of school continuously because their emotional needs are not met. Jourard (6) comments nothing makes an individual frustrated sooner than feeling useless, unwanted, unchallenged, and unneeded, or the feeling that the goals other individuals pursue are empty and joyless for him. The disadvantaged student needs reinforcement, encouragement and success if he is to continue to progress.

Further research is needed on the prevention of reading difficulties and this is urgently needed for the disadvantaged child. Schools should be organized so that they may serve as laboratories for individualized instruction. Reading programs should include associative learning and visual thinking activities together with group guidance. Teachers of reading aware of the multiple forces of pressures constantly bombarding the disadvantaged student should use their creativity to interest, stimulate, and motivate their students. Recognition for outstanding performance by reading teachers deserve compensation.

Our communities can provide protection for the disadvantaged against various diseases, but our communities have not provided protection for the disadvantaged against poverty, hunger, lack of heat in their homes, dirt, rags, need of sleep, need of love, and understanding. The disadvantaged must build for himself and his family a new image, new attitudes and a new culture.

Are teachers of reading willing, will they be ready to certify their unstinted aid to the disadvantaged student as he attempts to find a new way of life?

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